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UNCLAS ABUJA 000478

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PTER NI

SUBJECT: TERRORIST ARREST EXAGGERATED

REF: ABUJA 0017

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, NOT FOR PUBLICATION ON THE INTERNET OR INTRANET.

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Press reports claimed that an alleged agent of al-Qaeda, with links to Saudi Arabia, was arrested in Kano on 19 February. Further investigation has revealed that a poison pen letter spurred both the detention and the press accounts, and the press-reported international terrorism link may not exist. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Both local and international press reports claimed that a Sudanese national was arrested on 19 February for links to a Saudi-funded charity and al-Qaeda. Sheikh Muhibbin Abdullahi, head of the Almuntada Al-Islami Foundation in Kano, was said to have funneled funds from Saudi Arabia, through the Almuntada organization to "international terrorists."

¶3. (U) Further investigation of the reports indicate that Abdullahi was detained for questioning on the basis of a poison pen letter from a disgruntled employee, Alhaji Sharu, of the Almontada charity in Kano, claiming that Abdullahi had "provided security information" to Al-Sunna wal Jama'a, a splinter Islamic cult involved in violent confrontations with Nigerian authorities in Yobe state last December (reftel). According to one high-level GON source, the unhappy staffer sent a letter to the Nigerian police and the State Security Services (SSS) office in Kano. This GON source says that Abdullahi was released on 21 February after questioning. "They found no evidence" of his ties to either the Nigerian Al-Sunna group or to international terrorism. Post has verified from other sources that Abdullahi was indeed released shortly after being arrested and questioned.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: "Terrorist" remains a catchword in Nigeria as elsewhere, and workers often send poison pen letters to government officials to settle personal scores. The letter from Sharu to the SSS appears to fit this category. With the debunking of this particular press story, concrete information about potential Nigerian ties to international terrorist organizations remains elusive.

ROBERTS